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Coaching #1 Modifying Behavior Through Coaching

Modifying Behavior

How can we get what we want? If things keep going as they have been, then one can predict that certain results will be produced. If you like those predictable results, then keep doing what you are doing, and encourage others to do the same. However, if you want results that differ from those predictable, then yours and others' future actions must be transformed.

There are many alternatives available for modifying the behavior of others, including telling them what to do, requests, threats, incentives, feedback, advice, hints, repetition, practice, teaching, training, mentoring, counseling, and coaching.

Some of these alternatives have significant disadvantages. For example, a threat or incentive is often effective in changing behavior only as long as it is applied. In addition, there are often undesirable consequences after the threat or incentive is no longer present. For example, performance may actually worsen after a financial incentive is won and no additional incentives are visible. Trying to remember advice while in action often has the effect of worsening performance. Imagine the impact of trying to remember advice while acting on stage, playing a sport or a musical instrument, or making a speech.

With today's emphasis on the empowered employee and team operation, methods depending on command and control are less acceptable and useful than they might have been in the past. Today we need to be able to alter the actions of others without telling them what to do and without them having to remember anything.

Even traditional incentives have less power in our more fluid economy, when equivalent benefits might be received elsewhere. Threats are definitely less acceptable in today's workplace, with its greater sensitivity to the views and attitudes of the individual worker.

In this series of articles, while discussing many methods of impacting the behavior of and results produced by another, we are going to focus primarily on coaching. A major advantage of coaching is that the coach is able to impact the performance of another (the "player") without the player having to remember anything. Thus, coaching can be a powerful tool for producing desired results.



Advantages of Coaching

In business and other organizations, coaching as a means of behavior modification appears far superior to other approaches. The player naturally shifts to new behavior. The effects are long lasting, often without further intervention by the coach. The player perceives the coaching as supporting something the player is interested in, rather than something to benefit the coach, and thus there is often less resistance. Therefore coaching can take less time than other methods.

On the most successful teams, everyone coaches, not just the team leader.

Disadvantages of Coaching

It is almost impossible to coach someone who doesn't want to be coached. Unfortunately, many people do not request and are not open to coaching. As a result, they are not questioning themselves as to what they could do to make things different. They just go on living with unsolved problems, often preferring the role of helpless victim to what they may perceive as riskier alternatives.

Few know how to coach skillfully. Training courses on coaching for non-professionals are scarce, particularly in comparison to the plethora of courses on figuring out how and what to tell people to do. If not performed skillfully, coaching can take longer than other methods. Because the person being coached plays an important role, the results may not be exactly what the coach envisioned. In moments of stress, people often fall back on what appears to be a simpler approach, such as telling people what to do.

Questions

There are many questions about coaching which this series of articles will endeavor to answer:

- How does coaching differ from other methods of impacting behavior in the workplace — specifically training, teaching, mentoring, giving advice, giving feedback, and counseling?
- When is coaching called for, and when not?
- How does one detect whether others are open to being coached, and, if they are not, how can one encourage them to be receptive?
- What skills help increase a coach's effectiveness?
- Do individuals have preferred styles of coaching and of being coached?
- What guidelines can help make coaching more effective?



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Summary

In today's world, behavior modification methods based on command and control and the "all-knowing" manager are less acceptable and effective than in the past. Today's employees want to have a say in what they do, and they want what they do to support their own desires and goals. At the same time, people's actions must be consistent and supportive of the organization's goals. Coaching is an effective and powerful method for accomplishing these ends.

This series of articles on coaching will distinguish coaching from other forms of behavior modification, and provide tips and techniques for coaching efficiently and effectively.